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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

TRANSCRIPT OF SPECIAL NEWS BRIEFING
SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 1978, 4:00 P.M.
(ON THE RECORD UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED)

MR. RESTON: Good afternoon.

I want to try to give you a little bit of an update on where we stand on the tragic incidents which took place yesterday in Guyana. I think, essentially now, we are through Phase One of this operation, Phase One being essentially the outgrowth of the incidents in Guyana yesterday when the people were killed and wounded. Essentially, what we have is a figure of five persons dead, ten wounded, two of them seriously, and one slightly wounded who did not come out of Guyana. The person who was only slightly injured and who is ambulatory, as I said this morning, is the Deputy Chief of Mission of the United States Embassy in Guyana. His name is Mr. Richard Dwyer, and he has remained behind.

Q Are you coutning him among the ten?

A I am counting him among the ten wounded.

Q Richard Dwyer?

A D-w-y-e-r.

that particular part of Guyana is today, I'm sorry.

The bodies of the people who lost their lives at the airport are remaining behind in Guyana at the moment.

Q In Georgetown?

A No. They are last reported at the air strip. We believe that they will be transported to Georgetown as soon as possible.

Question?

Q Is the Embassy officer going in with the troops to Jonestown?

A You mean is the Deputy Chief of Mission --

Q No. I understand it was an Embassy officer who flew out with them to Mathews Ridge and then into the air strip this morning, to Port Kaituma, an officer of the U.S. Embassy.

A I do not know whether an officer from the U.S. Embassy is accompanying the security forces which are making their way towards Jonestown. I will take that question. The Deputy Chief of Mission remains at the airstrip and is expected to depart shortly, if he has not done so already, for Georgetown.

The pathologist I mentioned this morning who went down on the C-141 from the United States has remained behind to assit the Guyanese authorities as they begin to conduct their investigations into the crimes which were apparently committed.

We have now not quite entered into the next phase of this series of occurrences, which is essentially what is going on now in Jonestown, Guyana. The Guyanese security forces and police forces which I was talking with you about this morning, have not yet reached Jonestown. They are not there yet. They are presently on that dirt road which runs from the air strip to the settlement at Jonestown. They are proceeding up the road. I do not have an estimated time of arrival for you. They are proceeding on foot; they are proceeding cautiously; and I just don't have an estimate for you on when they might reach there.

Q How far is that, Tom?

A It takes in a jeep, in dry weather, twenty minutes.

Q Is it wet down there?

A I do not know what the weather down there in

Q Without getting into anything accusatory, they have been on the ground there now for nearly twelve hours.

A Yes.

Q It's just a twenty-minute jeep ride away. What is the explanation or the reason that they haven't gotten into Jonestown yet?

A I'm not sure what the situation on the ground is. I'm not sure whether there are vehicles available for them to use. I do not know whether there is motor fuel available there for the vehicles should they wish to use them. It's my understanding that they are proceeding on foot; they are proceeding cautiously. There is at least, given the events of yesterday, the possibility that hostile action could conceivably take place, although I hasten to add right away, we have no reports of any hostile action at this time. But I think that the Guyanese are proceeding cautiously.

Q Are we satisfied with the way they have gone about this?

A Yes.

Q Tom, we have heard of some people who are unidentified who are not among the dead or the wounded. How many are there and what is the process of going about looking for them?

A I think that we were talking about a number of people at the airport this morning who were there during the incidents. I think we were talking about around 18 or 20 who had originally come in on the flight from Georgetown, another six to ten who had indicated that they apparently wanted to leave the settlement at Jonestown, so what you're really talking about there is 25, 26, 27 people. We have accounted at the present time for 15 of them. We have no reports on the others.

Q You have ten missing, essentially?

A Ten that I don't have any reports to offer you on.

Q Do you have any more reports of suicides?

A No. I am not able at this time to confirm for you the report by the Guyanese police on the suicide of the woman in Georgetown, nor the death of the three

children in Georgetown.

As to what may be taking place in the State of California, in Los Angeles and in San Francisco, I have heard reports from at least San Francisco that nothing ontoward seems to be going on there at the moment, but really I am not your best source on that, and I refer you to the police departments of those two cities.

Q Tom, the one report of suicides at Jonestown, that is the one from the fellow who went overland last night to Mathews Ridge, and that's it, as far as you know?

A Let me try to -- There was a report of a suicide in Georgetown.

Q Right.

A And connected with that suicide was the death of three children. That is one incident. There is a report which has been made by a former member of the Peoples Temple Community at Jonestown, who escaped and went to Mathews Ridge last night. He has delivered a report to Guyanese authorities about mass suicides in

Jonestown. We have not yet been able to talk with the person who made that report. Therefore, I am not able to offer you any independent confirmation of that through U.S. officials, and obviously, not through the security forces which have not yet arrived at Jonestown.

Q Tom, did you release the names that took us from six this morning to ten? Do you have names to make that ten wounded?

A I'm sorry, I'm not in a position to offer you the names of the additional wounded. Let me say with regard to where we stand on the evacuation, the C-141 plane, which I mentioned to you this morning, took off from Georgetown, Guyana, at 12:56 EST. At just about 3:30 EST this afternoon it landed at Roosevelt Roads in Puerto Rico. Some of the most seriously wounded are being taken off the plane there so that they can receive medical attention -- medical attention in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico. The rest of the evacuees will be flown from Roosevelt Roads to Andrews Air Force Base in suburban, Maryland. I do not an estimated time of arrival for that

C-141 for you at this time.

Q Has it taken off in Puerto Rico?

A It has not taken off, to my knowledge.

Q How many were taken off in Puerto Rico?

A The intention was to take off two in Puerto Rico, but I do not know -- that medical judgment could have been updated since the time I was given it, so I do not know how many actually have been taken off.

Q --which would leave, what, Tom, seven, then? You've got one left in --

A That would leave seven wounded on the plane which will be on its way to Andrews.

Q Could you confirm that an American has been arrested in connection with the killings?

A I have heard that report, but I am not in a position to confirm it for you.

Q What was the question?

A The question was, could I confirm a report that an American has been arrested in connection with the alleged killings, and I cannot confirm that report for you.

Q Tom, can you tell us who is still missing? Are both the attorneys among the missing?

A It is my understanding that both the attorneys who are counsel for the Peoples Temple Community are presently in Jonestown, Guyana.

Q They are not missing in Jonestown?

A It is my understanding that they are accounted for and that they are presently in Jonestown.

Q Does it follow that they went off on the flatbed truck or some such thing?

A No, it does not follow.

Q Were they at the airport or did they go back to the hotel?

A It is my understanding they were at the airport and that they are presently back in Jonestown.

Q How do we know that? How do we know that they are in Jonestown? We have absolutely no knowledge of what else is going on in Jonestown. Do we know that the two of them are there?

A It is my understanding that they are in Jonestown. I do not have a source for my information.

Q Tom, to get back to the original question, who is missing?

A All I can say is that I gave you a list this morning of the people who were on the original passenger list going into the airstrip and into Jonestown. I am just going to have to ask you to compare the list which I gave you this morning with the ones which I have accounted for.

Q Tom, I'm sorry -- you've been extremely cautions

A Ted, I'm sorry. Les.

Q That's all right. I'll yield to Ted, and then --

A No, go ahead, Les.

Q Is the Secretary aware that the Rev. Mr. Jones was made the head of the City Housing Authority by San Francisco's Democratic Mayor Moscone, a protege of Congressman Burton?

A I don't know.

Q And during the Presidential Campaign of 1976--

A I've answered your question.

Q Wait a minute. I haven't finished it, Tom.

A I've answered your question.

Ted, go ahead.

Q Could I, please --

A Mr. Koppel.

Q Why not let Les finish it?

Q Yes.

A I do not know whether the Secretary was aware of it.

Q All right. Is he aware that Jones was asked aboard Vice President Mondale's chartered jet in the Presidential campaign, that he shared a platform with Rosalynn Carter?

A I don't know.

Q Will we ask for the Reverend Mr. Jones' extradition?

A I don't know.

Q Tom, how close --

A I'm sorry. Mr. Koppel was next.

Q Tom, since you were very cautious about the mass suicides that may or may not be going on in Jonestown I'm just wondering how it is that you know -- and you do appear to know; I mean you're not couching it in your usual cautious language -- that both these attorneys are now in Jonestown. Do you have knowledge of anything that is going on in Jonestown?

A I'm sorry. The full investigation obviously is going to have to be taken, carried out, by the security forces which are on their way to Jonestown and which have not yet arrived there.

Q Well --

A Now, just a minute, please.

That is not to say that we have no information. Obviously we believe that the two attorneys at this time are in Jonestown.

Q Well --

A I don't have a sourcing for our information for you.

Q Tom, that's fine -- excuse me, if I could just follow up my own question. You know that and that the issue, which seems far more overriding at the moment, is whether or not 200 suicides or anything like it have taken place in Jonestown. You have no information at all on that?

A I have no information beyond the information which I just went over with you, and I sourced that information for you. I have no further information to offer on what may have occurred last night or yesterday afternoon in Jonestown.

Q Tom --

A Yes, sir.

Q Tom, have you talked or have Guyanan official U. S. officials, been in contact with either attorney in

Jonestown by phone?

A I don't believe so.

Q You don't know that they haven't.

A You are correct. I do not know that we have not.

Q You have no idea where this report comes from then, is that what you said?

A I am not in a position to give you a source on the report.

Q Well, did they stay behind yesterday?

A Did they stay behind yesterday?

Q In Jonestown -- which would explain their being there.

A You mean without going to the airport.

Q To the airfield, yes.

A It was my understanding that they had gone to the airport, but I will check myself and correct the record if I am wrong about that.

Yes, sir.

Q Can we assume that neither of the attorneys was wounded? Do you information on that?

A I have received no reports that either of

of the attorneys was wounded. On the other hand, I simply do not have any information about their physical condition. But I have received no reports that they were wounded.

Q Tom --

A Yes, sir.

Q Back to --

Q How close are we to identifying that fifth death?

A I am not sure that the next of kin has yet been notified.

Q I mean will we know before the day is out? Will there be some --

A I don't know. I will check on that for you.

Q Is she a member of a sect or not?

A I am not going to get into that until we have notified the next of kin.

Yes, sir.

Q Back of couple of things from this morning. If the State Department was aware of complaints before all this happened from parents of youngsters who apparently -- who might have been mistreated there -- did

the State Department ever take any action to stop it or actively at least investigate that possibility?

A Yes. It's one of those things that I wanted to clear up from this morning. In fact, I had a list. I went back through the transcript to see areas that I thought were somewhat confused. Unfortunately, I don't have my list in front of me here.

But let's go to this question. First of all I was asked what proportion of the settlement at Jonestown was children versus adults. It is our understanding that are some 1,000 or 1,100 Americans resident at Jonestown, Guyana. Of those I have seen varying reports, but some 50 or 60 might be described as children. And by "children" I want to define this carefully because I mean children under 14 years old who are readily identified as adolescent or pre-adolescent children.

Now, I cannot give you an approximate number for people who might be in their twenties; and that might have been part of, kind of, the definition of "children." But that becomes increasingly difficult to identify. But the best figure I can give you -- and it's really a guesstimate -- is 50 or 60 children.

Now, I was asked this morning when the State Department first became aware of complaints that people were being held there against their will; and I was also asked whether the State Department had become directly aware of this.

The answer is that the State Department has been directly aware from American citizens of such complaints. And when such complaints began to reach us -- the answer to that question is the first of this year. So it's been about a year ago, less than a year ago.

Q Tom --

A Now, just let me -- can I finish with the gentleman's question, please?

Q Go on.

A Now, you ask further: What, if anything, did the State Department do? Did we investigate? What was the nature of our role in looking into this matter?

State Department consular officials, as I said this morning, did visit Jonestown, Guyana, on a periodic basis -- once a month or once every six weeks.

Q Consular officials?

A Consular officials.

During the course of these visits -- which were made for normal consular purposes -- to see whether, for instance, Social Security benefits were being received; to see that births were being registered as they occurred -- when we received complaints from relatives in the United States that, conceivably, people were being kept in Jonestown, Guyana, against their will, we attempted, as best we could, through our Consular Officers, to ascertain whether this was true. We attempted to talk with the individuals whose names we have been provided by their relatives here in the United States to see whether they believe they were being held against their will.

We attempted to do this, whenever we could, privately with the individuals named in the letters we had received from their relatives here in the United States.

Q Did you ever have contact with any of them?

A Yes. Our Consular Officers did

Q Were there complaints that they made and, if so, were the complaints ever followed up?

A To my knowledge, no resident of Jonestown

ever admitted to a State Department Consular Officer that they were being held in Jonestown against their will.

Q Tom, you say these consular visits were monthly?

A Yes -- I think the frequency varied. We would go in there periodically, as we probably would in any similar situation where you have a large concentration of United States nationals resident in a foreign country.

Q One other follow-up, if you will, please: Any more on what we discussed this morning about briefings that Congressman Ryan might have received either here or advic he might have received in Guyana before making the journey? Was he warned not to go by anone in the Government that you're aware of?

A Yes; I think I can clear that up. It was a matter of some confusion, and I apologize for this morning's briefing. But I have checked that out further and I really invite other questions which you were unclear about this morning because I did seek further elucidation.

I just don't have my list in front of me; but to respond to your specific question, it is my understanding that Congressman Ryan was in the Department of State in

August for a briefing. It is my understanding that he came back to the Department of State very shortly before his visit to Guyana, which began on November 14th.

Congressman Ryan, by virtue of the constituency which he represents, was aware of the allegations made by certain of his constituents with regard to the Community in Guyana.

I would not say that it would be fair to characteriz those briefings as warning him not to go. I think the substance of what was discussed was more or less as the following:

I think, for the part of the State Department, we indicated to the Congressman that we recognized that it was part of his duty to render service to his constituents. And this was a problem which some of his constituents perceived and Congressman Ryan was behaving in a public-spirited manner in trying to track down those complaints. We offered to render assistance and, in fact, did render assistance to Congressman Ryan during his journey in Guyana. As I mentioned this morning, even the No. 2 man in our Embassy accompanied the Congressman as he went to Jonestown.

Now, having said that, I will say that the State

Department urged caution upon Congressman Ryan. And we did, in a logistical sense, indicate to him the logistical difficulties of taking a large entourage of people into so remote an area of Guyana. So we made him aware of lack of fuel supplies, lack of vehicles, difficulty of communication -- that sort of thing.

Q You didn't tell him that it was a peaceful, idylic Community? There was no information given to him that things were peaceful there, or was that the information that he received?

A I can't -- you know, I have tried as best I can to give you the thrust of what the State Department was telling Congressman Ryan during those briefings so far as I understand it from the briefing officers.

Q Tom, that sounds a bit like the signs on the road when there's construction: "Proceed at Your Own Risk." Would that be a fair characterization of what State told the Congressman?

A No. I think what a fair characterization of what State told Congressman Ryan was as I have expressed it to you.

Q Tom, I don't understand. When you say the

State Department urged caution upon Congressman Ryan, you mean to say that they urged caution in respect to the logistical arrangements in Guyana or that they urged caution in a larger sense -- that this is a group that may be volatile?

A I think the thrust of what we were telling the Congressman really had to do with the logistical difficulties of taking a large entourage of people --

Q Now --

A Now wait; can I finish?

Q Sure.

A -- people on his own staff or on the Congressional staff, media people, relatives of people who might have been resident at Jonestown.

But, nevertheless, there was an aspect to it just to behave with caution and common sense. But I think this would be the normal kind of advice that our Embassies or the State Department would give Americans traveling abroad.

[Cont'd on pg. C-1.]

Q So if I understand it correctly, then, you are saying that there was no special caution given by the State Department to the Congressman regarding the kind of people he was dealing with.

A I am not in a position to elaborate for you because the person whom I talked with said we urged caution on him, and he did not elaborate. Therefore I am unwilling to wing it and try to elaborate on what I was told.

Q It is an important point, and I wonder whether you can ask again?

A I will attempt to get, if I can, an elaboration of the context of that word.

Q Tom, how did Congressman Ryan and his party proceed from the Port Kaituma airstrip to Jonestown? Did they go on foot or were they received by jeeps and taken there along the road?

A I will take that question.

Q Tom, other unfinished business from this morning, the version of the events that we have had up to now were based upon the eye witness report only of the air crews. You have now talked with some survivors,

presumably, who were also there. Do you have any change to make or any amplification to make on the basic sequence of events, or any more details about what happened?

A I have no changes that I wish to make in the sequence of events. I don't think I have any changes to make at all. Frankly what I have been concentrating on since the briefing this morning is trying to ascertain for you what has happened in fact since eleven o'clock this morning, and that would have to do mostly with the airlifting of the wounded and injured out of Guyana.

Q Do you have any information about the type of plane being used, for example?

A I said this morning that the plane which did get off the airstrip was a Cessna, and if you would like me to find out if I can what the make and model of the second airplane is which had to remain on the airstrip, I will take that question.

Q There were a number of other details, like what kind of weapons were used.

A I have tried to find out what kind of weapons were used. We have no reports on that.

Q Tom, since six years ago, the San Francisco Examiner reported on page one that the Reverend Mr. Jones had ushers in his church equipped with three 57 magnums, and since last summer the New WEst Magazine reported that Rosalyn Carter's Secret Service people went into a "thet" as they described it, because of these armed guards.

Why is it that the State Department urged logistical caution rather than, say, military caution?

A I think the answer to your question, Les, is that I have undertaken, in response to one of your colleagues, to see if possible I can get you an elaboration on the context of the word "caution."

Q Could I follow that up?

Q Tom, do we have yet the name of the United States embassy officer who accompanied the forces into the airstrip and who presumably may be with them in Georgetown?

A No, but I have undertaken to get you an answer to the question as to whether the embassy officer s indeed with the Security forces who are making their way up the road.

I will also take the question of what the name of such a person is.

Q But we don't have the name of the man who had gone up there to Mathews with the Security forces.

A I do not have that name in front of me. I will try to get it for you if there is such a person.

Q Did you say that in the morning transcript there is a complete passenger list for those two aircraft? Did you give that this morning?

A Yes.

Q I didn't find that.

A Yes, I did, except I did not give the names of, I think, three or four of the relatives.

Q Tom, after the initial attack last night, did the attackers immediately withdraw? And, secondly, during the night, did any of the wounded receive any kind of first aid from any source, or did they just lie there in the aircraft for hours?

A The answer to both your questions is, I don't know.

Q Tom, can I ask you about this four-page hand-out you gave us this morning?

There was a phrase in it which, when you gave us your oral reading of this sequence of events, you omitted, and in the second draft of it, when you said

that the flatbed trailer pulled by a tractor appeared on the airstrip and that a number of people in the trailer opened fire on Congressman Ryan and his delegation, the phrase you omitted when you gave it to us orally was that this number of people in the trailer were presumed to be Peoples Temple members.

Is there any doubt in your mind as to whether they were indeed Peoples Temple members?

A The statement which I delivered to you this morning orally is the statement of the Department of State.

The thing which I handed out to you was for your ability to follow along. I said that the statement I was going to deliver would be somewhat different from the thing which you received.

The statement which I made orally is our statement.

I am not going to make any statement which might have an impact on the law in Guyana in the absence of a complete investigation by Guyanese security forces.

Q Tom, do you know whether the Guyanese authorities are proceeding to Jonestown tonight, or do you know whether they will rest overnight on the road?

A I don't.

Q Tom, what attitude is the Department taking towards additional members of the press who might go to Guyana? The San Francisco Examiner has two men on the way, and I understand Time Magazine also has.

A I said this morning that there has been an understandable humanitarian concern with what has happened in Guyana, both in terms of the victims and in terms of us wanting to resolve this situation as efficiently as we can.

We have made an effort to bring increased embassy personnel to Georgetown. We have a C-130 on the way from Panama, stopping in Venezuela and going on into Georgetown, bringing administrative and consular personnel with it.

I understand also that there is one consular officer who is coming in commercially to Georgetown on commercial aircraft from Trinidad.

The embassy has an increased workload and I am sure that there will be others who will be interested in this story, and we will try to deal with it as efficiently as we can.

Q Tom, has there been direct contact either by the embassy or by the Department with the DCM, the Deputy Chief of Mission.

A Yes, I understand. I assume that there has been, because at one point I was told that he expected to be in Georgetown by dark, and at another time I was told that he was still at the airstrip at Port Kaituma.

Now I assume that that indicates some communication between Georgetown and the Deputy Chief of Mission, but I don't know of any specific telephonic communication.

Q Do you plan to get back to us again this evening?

A No, I had not planned on getting back to you again this evening.

Q Are there any efforts for handling some of the people in Jonestown who might want to leave? Is the United States going to provide transportation for those people who might want to leave now?

A We will await the arrival of Guyanese security forces in the Jonestown area so that we can ascertain what the facts are on the ground. If there are people in need of medical attention, we will be prepared to provide all assistance necessary to treat them

or to deal with their desires. But until we have a good fix on the factual situation, I think that the question which you ask is a hypothetical one.

Q Tom, can you tell us if Congressman Ryan proceeded without -- on this trip without any kind of contact with the Jonestown community or its leaders, or was there some kind of a prior contact before he went in there?

A I am not competent to answer your question. I suggest you contact the Congressman's office.

Q Are there any bodies that might be brought out, and how will they be brought back to the United States?

A The bodies will be brought back as soon as possible from Port Kaituma to Georgetown.

Q Tom, can you tell us who is on the C-141 that is on its way back? Is it just the wounded, or other members of the Congressman's party?

A It is, without giving names, nine wounded, one relative of a wounded person, the crew, which is flying the airplane, a back-up crew to fly the airplane, and I believe nine medical, seven personnel, medical

personnel, doctors and nurses.

Q Seven or nine? I'm sorry.

A Seven.

Q Seven medical.

A Yes.

Q Tom, is the Justice Department involved or the FBI involved in investigating the shooting or killing yet?

A Ask the Justice Department.

Q Do you happen to know yourself?

A I don't.

Q Tom, is it known how many other Congressmen have been murdered while in a foreign country?

A Not by me. Any other questions?

Q Wait a minute, Tom, I haven't finished.

A Go ahead, your next.

Q All right. You said twice that those bodies will be taken back to Georgetown as soon as possible.

A Yes.

Q Do you have any idea how soon after that they will be brought back to the United States?

A No, sir. It is my understanding, or it would seem logical to me that pursuant to the laws of Guyana, there would have to be an investigation, which would mean that there would have to be an autopsy to establish the cause of death of these people. And I believe that that would probably have to be carried out within the territorial jurisdiction of Guyana.

Q Could I ask a question on another matter?

A Yes.

Q Could you tell us what the origin was of this statement by Secretary Vance this morning on Iran, what prompted it?

A It was in response to press items which we saw in the Soviet press yesterday with regard to the situation in Iran.

Q Tom, in other words, if the autopsy and investigation drag on, apparently the Carter administration is not going to do anything except deplore the murder of the Congressman and the news men.

A The question is entirely hypothetical. The United States Government has dispatched a pathologist to assist the Guyanese authorities. We believe that the

cooperation thus far of the Guyanese authorities has been splendid.

Q Thank you, Tom.

[The briefing concluded at 4:40 p.m.]